

The **UNITED STATES SENATE**  
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## **Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on HHS Nominees**

### *As Prepared for Delivery*

This morning the Finance Committee meets to discuss three nominations for important roles in the Biden administration.

First up, January Contreras is President Biden's nominee to serve as Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Children and Families. This role is all about overseeing programs that deal with caring for some of the most vulnerable people in the country -- particularly young people.

A big part of that job over the last few years has been the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, which is a once-in-a-generation overhaul of our child welfare system that this committee wrote on a bipartisan basis. Family First is designed to help families stay together whenever it's safe and possible instead of breaking them up as a matter of course. Implementing that law has required a lot of close collaboration between the federal government and the states. It's been a challenge, particularly under the previous administration.

Fortunately, Ms. Contreras is well-versed in the Family First law. Across her decades in public service, Ms. Contreras has championed the safety and well-being of women, children and families. Most recently she's led Arizona Legal Women and Youth Services, a legal aid organization for children and young adults who have experienced abuse, neglect, family separation, homelessness, and human trafficking. I look forward to discussing all these issues with her.

Now, I always say that the best nomination hearings are the ones with nominees from Oregon, and today is no exception. Our second nominee today is Rebecca Jones Gaston, President Biden's nominee to serve as HHS Commissioner for Children, Youth and Families.

Ms. Jones Gaston is a uniquely qualified nominee because she brings nearly 25 years of experience in the field of human services and child welfare. She currently serves as Child Welfare Director for Oregon's Department of Human Services. She is a crusader on behalf of vulnerable people. Recently, she has been spending her time providing older youth with additional COVID support services and has been at the helm of implementing the Family First law in Oregon.

I can tell you, she's got a lot of fans back home across our state, and she has made Oregon families healthier and safer.

Before she came out west to Oregon, Ms. Jones Gaston served as the Executive Director of the Maryland Social Services Administration. In fact, she helped design and implement Maryland's plan for Family First with Governor Larry Hogan. That means she's worked with officials on both sides of the aisle and she's proven she knows how to get things done. In my view, President Biden couldn't have picked a better nominee. If and when she's confirmed, Oregon's loss will be the country's gain.

Finally, Robert Gordon is President Biden's nominee to serve as HHS Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources. Mr. Gordon has worn a lot of hats during his career in public service.

Most recently, he served as director of the Department of Health & Human Services for the State of Michigan, playing a central role in the state's pandemic response and managing an agency of 14,000 employees and a \$27 billion budget. Previously, he held senior roles in the U.S. Department of Education and at the Office of Management & Budget, where he championed evidence-based policymaking to use taxpayer dollars wisely. Earlier in his career, Mr. Gordon served as a senior official at the New York City Department of Education; a senior aide on Capitol Hill; a law clerk for Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; and a White House aide, helping create the AmeriCorps program.

All in all, Mr. Gordon is a highly-experienced public servant. When you're working on finances at HHS, the core of your job is upholding the guarantee of Medicare, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program -- ensuring that those programs and many others under the HHS umbrella remain strong for future generations.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for joining the committee today and for their willingness to serve. I look forward to questions.

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